AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

MEDIA INFRASTRUCTURE: VISIBILITY AND SPACE BUILDING IN WORKING-CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGH PIRACY

by
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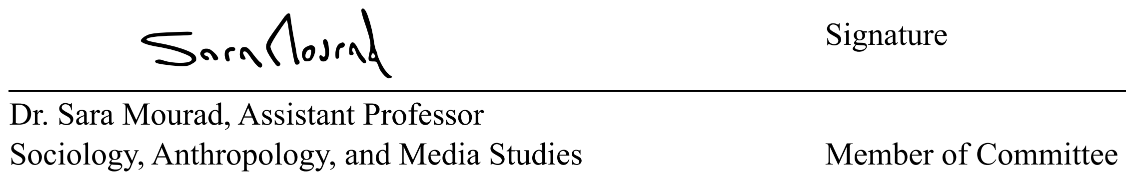

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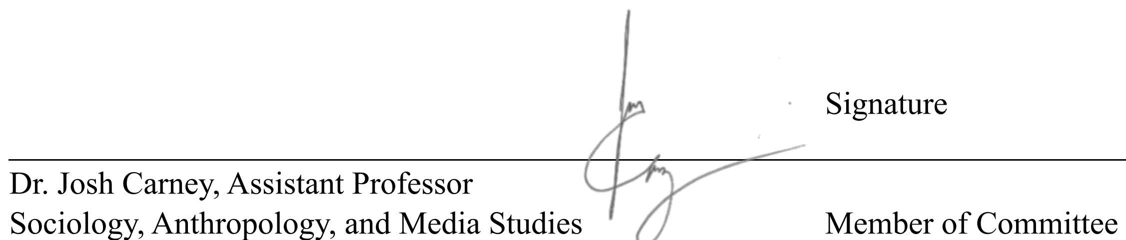

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ABSTRACT
OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: Media Infrastructure: Visibility and Space Building in Working-class Neighbourhoods Through Piracy.

This work explores how urban spaces are experienced in relation to exposed infrastructure. It examines how exposed infrastructure is utilized by residents of Dahieh to mitigate being technologically marginalized. The thesis brings forth the concepts of hard and soft piracy to highlight the physical work that residents perform to gain access. By juxtaposing hard and soft piracy, I demonstrate that soft piracy, which has been written about extensively in the field of Media Studies, needs to be preceded by hard piracy, at least in the case of Dahieh.

I focus on the working-class neighborhoods of Dahieh, on the peripheries of Beirut, to uncover how media infrastructure is dealt with on the phenomenological level in order to combat the technological exclusion that marks the experiences of living in these areas. I argue that living on the margins of Beirut also means being on the margins of technology. As such, material interactions with media infrastructure, such as wire rigging and channel hacking, become inevitable.

The question of space comes to answer how media infrastructures are implicated not only in building space but also defining how this space is experienced. As a result of the shortcoming in the urban organization in working-class areas in Beirut, media infrastructure exists in visible form. This visibility enables technologically excluded citizens to come in contact with media infrastructure and mitigate the impact of marginalization, and thus, an experience of space is produced. A discussion of media infrastructure's contribution to building spatial experiences can draw an understanding of how media infrastructure and infrastructure in general function under the prevalent economic system.

Keywords: Infrastructure, media, piracy, visibility, urban, experience, gender.

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DEDICATION

To Jedo, who keeps it no secret that I am his favorite.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

As one walks through Dahieh, the poorly developed southern suburbs of Beirut, one cannot help but notice the contested and loosely organized electrical infrastructure obscuring one's view of the sky (figure 1 and 2). The omnipresence of media infrastructure in Beirut's peripheries is not random, but a systemic phenomenon that mirrors the conditions of accessibility to basic services and technology like electricity, water, and even WiFi provision. However, these wires and electric towers do much more than cover the sky. For the people living on the peripheries of Beirut, the visibility of media infrastructure is directly tied to their tangibility. The materiality of infrastructure proves useful for residents living in areas where electricity cuts went out for more than six hours prior to the economic crisis of 2019.

Today, during Lebanon's harshest economic collapse in the country's history, governmental electricity is available for four hours on good days and generator subscriptions have sky-rocketed with the increase in fuel prices, leaving many living in unbearable everyday conditions. As a result, many working-class residents of Dahieh capitalize on the visibility and tangibility of media infrastructure to rig and pirate wires to keep a constant flow of electricity. Such a maneuver speaks to a larger desire to overcome the material conditions under which they live.

Figure 1. Messy visible wires
(Photo by Danah El Kaouri)

Figure 2. Messy visible wires

(Photo by Danah El Kaouri)

What sparked my interest in infrastructure was a conversation I overheard between my mother and uncle concerning a friend's severe injury which he suffered during a football match in the streets of Chiyah, a working-class neighborhood in Dahieh. The cause of this injury was not the result of falling during the match, nor was it getting tackled, he received this injury by climbing an electric tower to fetch a football which got stuck up there. I remember this incident for two reasons: first, because I thought it was quite strange and even reckless that the immediate response to this inconvenience was to climb a contested electric tower. Second, it highlighted how much infrastructure

was within the reach of residents. Both ideas would come to make more sense once I learned that electric towers were climbed for reasons other than fetching a football.

There are two main arguments to this thesis. I discuss them separately at the first and combine them to yield a connection between piracy and infrastructure. The first, argues that media infrastructure is far from blending into the background of our everyday lives, as scholars based in Europe and North America would suggest. In fact, media infrastructure in the Global South does more than simply *not* sink into the background of everyday life. Its omnipresence is so blatant and tangible, that it starts to define the ways in which urban space is experienced. This experience is created and reinforced by the dysfunction of infrastructure and its hard piracy that comes as a result. The experience of space thus, is defined by the repeated acts of piracy, which is possible because of media infrastructure's visibility.

The second argument is that hacking or piracy is not always trying to download media illegally through piracy websites, which I refer to as soft piracy. Hard piracy that requires expertise and physical work is prevalent in areas on Beirut's margins and includes several practices like rigging the neighbor's electricity line so that two households share the same line of electricity or connecting the elevator's line to a household's line. The rigged lines are located in electricity rooms usually adjacent to the entrance of the residential building. They contain individual electrical switches corresponding to every household in the building. Therefore, all residents have access to this area, ideally, this access is given to maintain one's flow of legal electrical flow. However, this structure also allows residents to rig other residents' exposed electrical lines.

Together, these two arguments aim to rethink how we approach the topic of piracy in the media studies field and to offer a new definition of piracy, one that is not only concerned with access to Hollywood blockbusters but with accessing basic services that we often take for granted. Both these arguments formulate under the acknowledgment that the contribution of media infrastructure to the experience of space and the inevitability of hard piracy in Dahieh do not occur randomly, rather these phenomena are systematic, and fit into the capitalist logic under which urban areas are built. Thus, we can begin to assume that the hard piracy of media infrastructure in Beirut's peripheries defines spatial experiences and is a gateway to informal access.

For this work, I have conducted a field study in Dahieh where the state's presence is nonexistent and matters of essential services are left to political parties, local communities, and private providers to decide. I did this with the help of an interlocutor who was born and raised in Dahieh and had a number of invaluable contacts. I spoke with residents and business owners and asked them about their conditions of access and the exposed wires. This thesis will make use of these interviews to analyze the social dynamics that emerge as a result of faulty infrastructure and how community members respond to everyday inconveniences caused by faulty infrastructure by capitalizing on the visibility of wires. I conducted my field research between 2020, 2021, and 2020. Throughout these years the state of electricity in Lebanon drastically changed. The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed extreme blackouts across Lebanon. By the end of 2021, the electricity grid had some improvements albeit living conditions were still unbearable.

A. Theoretical Framework

This thesis examines the relationship between space, class, piracy, and infrastructure in urban Lebanon to offer a new understanding of media infrastructure by focusing on the physical and material aspects of urban conditions. To do so, it relies on the theoretical frameworks provided by de Certeau (1984) in *The Practice of Everyday Life,* Lefebvre's (1974) *The Production of Space,* David Harvey's (1996) *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference,* and Sara Ahmed's (2006) *Queer phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others.* The theories proposed by these thinkers will help in analyzing the ways in which media infrastructure is implicated in the creation of space specifically in working-class neighborhoods on the margins of Beirut.

First, de Certeau's differentiation of space and place is useful in identifying how media infrastructures are implicated in turning a place into space when they're physically engaged by citizens. De Certeau defines space as the composition "[...] of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities." (de Certeau 1984: p.117). While place adopts a more static character: "is an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of stability" (p. 117). From de Certeau's definitions, I assume that working-class citizens take the role of "mobile elements" while media infrastructure assumes the role of "stable" objects in neighborhoods. By placing these two elements (residents and media infrastructure) in a direct relationship I am able to define the dynamics that emerge due to faulty infrastructure. The "movements" that I focus on are the piracy

activities that take place in Dahieh which take place at times of infrastructural breakdown.

Lefebvre's line of thinking when it comes to space is similar to that of de Certeau's, as he writes: "when we evoke 'space', we must immediately indicate what occupies that space and how its does so: the deployment of energy in relation to 'points' and within a time frame" (Lefebvre, 1974, p. 12). Part of what makes working-class neighborhoods in Beirut "spaces" is the activities or "deployment of energy" that create the space, and the energies that this thesis is interested in are the hard piracies which include rigging of wires, hacking television channels, etc. to combat technological exclusion.

Harvey's *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* emphasizes that "social constructions of space and time are not wrought out of thin air, but shaped out of the various forms of space and time which human beings encounter in their struggle for material survival" (Harvey, 1996, p. 210). Although Harvey's definition is similar to the thinkers previously discussed, his is more specific in that he recognizes that space also constitutes a "struggle for material survival" which is relevant to my argument on the struggle for those on the peripheries of Beirut in their pursuit of technological inclusion.

Finally, Ahmed's work on "bodily horizons" (p. 2) which explains that bodies are oriented towards objects that they are familiar with is helpful to thesis in trying to crystalize how and why exposed media infrastructure and its piracy labor are acts carried out by heteronormative men within neighborhoods and how this creates a gendered experience of space.

With these theories, I plan to expand on how the technological exclusion of those on the margins and the blatant, visible media infrastructure in working-class neighborhoods contribute to the experience of space. In other words, I plan to use these explanations of

space to argue that activities that constitute it are guided by media infrastructure and that these activities subsequently lead to certain experiences or perceptions of the given space. The experience of space is not random under capitalism but is defined by one's socioeconomic class, Lefebvre writes: "the commodity world brings in its wake certain attitudes towards space, certain actions upon space, even a certain concept of space" (Lefebvre, 1991 p. 341) and using this line thinking can help us in breaking down the understanding of media infrastructures' functions under capitalism.

B. Literature Review

Authors have extensively discussed the topics of media infrastructure and piracy, however, we cannot fully make use of new critical thoughts without identifying the gaps that come with them. The dominant discourse surrounding media infrastructures is that they are bound by their invisibility and piracy is always associated with downloading, torrenting, jailbreaking, etc. For instance, Lisa Parks and Nicole Staroleinski (2015) write that infrastructures are defined by their invisibility: most of us hardly notice them until they fail or break down (Parks and Starolienski, 2015). This idea is echoed by other researchers. However, Parks is right in her definition of piracy as "material resources that are arranged and used to distribute audiovisual content" (Parks, 2015, p. 356). This definition is similar to that of Brian Larkin (2013) who writes that infrastructures are "matter that enable the movement of other matter. Their peculiar ontology lies in the facts that they are things and also the relation between things. As things they are present to the senses, yet they are also displaced in the focus on the matter they move around. We often see computers, not cables, light not electricity, taps and water but not pipes and sewers" (p. 329). While being mindful of the materiality of

media infrastructure, these studies fail to look at them as part of people's living conditions which impacts not only how a space is built up, but also how nuanced the experience of a place can be depending on the citizens' gender identifications and socioeconomic class.

The available body of literature overlooks the gendered angle of piracy and media infrastructure, and such a lens is useful when studying the two topics in the context of urban Beirut since physical pirating of media infrastructure is carried out by the men in the community. This idea is clearly seen in Nadine Labaki's *Caramel* (2007), as the designated person to turn on the generator after it switches off when too many appliances are running at the same time, is Rima, the tomboy of the group. Thus, gender is an interesting gateway of beginning to explore *why* men in the community or members with male attributes are in charge of re-working infrastructure on a daily basis and *how this* affects community members' relationship with their built environments.

Furthermore, the research around piracy has mostly concerned itself with issues of intellectual property, distribution of media productions, and copyright laws. Roman Lobato rethinks piracy to understand it "as an alternative distribution for media content" (Lobato, 2012, p. 16) to offer historical context and develop a conversation that is less concerned with the ethics of piracy and more interested in it as a distribution method. Lobato's insistence on studying piracy's "economic functions and its implications for knowledge and information distribution" is not misplaced and can in fact support this thesis as the hard piracy of media infrastructure that takes place in Dahieh is not completely informal and makes up a good portion of the area's economy, and the distribution of electricity in Beirut is not the same for all districts; as one moves farther from central Beirut, electricity cuts start to last for longer hours. This is one example of

how the study of soft piracy can help us in developing an understanding of hard piracy. However, the dominant way of thinking about piracy as 'illegal' distribution of media productions, which is prevalent across the scholarship (eg: Klinger, 2010; Papadimitriou, 2018), can miss out on a material understanding on piracy. Focusing on the materiality of piracy introduces types of physical expertise, which can, in turn, act as a stepping stone to other fields such as urban planning, economics, and citizenship.

Finally, although several works (Randa Nucho, 2017; Tawil-Souri, 2015; Atwood, 2019) have highlighted how media infrastructure in their physicality can be used to oppress and alienate certain communities in the Arab World, an attempt to combine media infrastructure and daily pirating with urban living has yet to be made. A spatial understanding of media infrastructure will add another dimension to our understanding of the topic by exploring how physical piracy of it contributes to *how* working-class urban spaces are experienced. A study of Beirut's urban setup is an important dimension to this thesis. Because I argue that access to basic necessities is defined by one's location in Beirut, it is important to offer a background on Beirut's urban setup, its history, and the politics that went into shaping it.

C. Peripheral Urban Beirut

Beirut's urban division still follows the 15-year civil war's sectarian logic, whereby each area is dominated by a sectarian party and its supporters. For instance, South Beirut is dominated by Shiite Muslims while East Beirut is a Christian-populated area. A good number of authors have uncovered the impacts of this sectarian urban division and they all seem to reach similar conclusions of the Shiite sect being the one associated with poverty in Lebanon. This is not a baseless association.

Hiba Bou Akar's *The War Yet to Come* (2018) covers sectarian-driven urban plans which shaped Sahra, Chouifet, an urban area located South of Beirut which was a Druze-dominated area prior to the war. It was considered the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) stronghold until it came to house Shiites whose apartment buildings were destroyed during the war. New apartment buildings that started mushrooming in Sahra were appealing to Shiites because they were somewhat affordable. But these apartments had their shortcomings. Bou Akar writes that "although the [PSP, who led] the area's municipality had initially given permits for the construction of these projects, allowing the units there to be occupied through formal channels, it had never extended municipal water, sewage, or electricity service to the area" (Bou Akar, 2018, p. 69). The issue was resolved by residents and developers who were supported by Hezbollah and Harakat Amal, the two political parties affiliated with the Shiite sect. Another infrastructure-related example that Bou Akar brings up is the media's coverage of the flooding of the streets that residents of Sahra, Choufeit have to prepare themselves for every winter. In the coverage, a citizen expresses her frustration of this infrastructural failure and complains that had the neighborhood been a Christian one, the situation would have been fixed the next day (Bou Akar, 2018, p. 75).

Thus, the citizen's association with infrastructure's functionality is linked to different sects. While Shiites were linked to unsatisfactory living conditions due to infrastructural failure and negligence, Christians were thought to have maintained and functioning infrastructure. Of course, this doesn't mean that citizens of East Beirut don't have to worry about infrastructural failure, especially during Lebanon's current fuel crisis that has left the city with endless hours of darkness. However, it is these associations that

can help us in understanding how the functionality of infrastructure can define citizenship.

The notion of Shiites being looked down upon and stigmatized is also explored in Deeb and Harb's *Leisurely Islam* (2013). When it comes to areas in the peripheries of Beirut, there are certain stereotypes and stigmatization about the residents of the peripheries. Deeb and Harb write of these stereotypes by interviewing residents in Dahieh about their experiences when they decide to leave the area to visit downtown Beirut. After the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik El Hariri in 2005 which was pinned on the Shia political parties, young women and men who reside in Dahieh noted the discomfort associated with going to downtown, Beirut where they might get into trouble or "strange situations" as Dahieh is the stronghold of the Shia political parties and other citizens in Beirut can identify residents of Dahieh by appearances. One of Deeb and Harb's interviewees expressed her frustration about why Hamra, located in central Beirut, is considered better than Dahieh and she sarcastically said that Hamra is considered more "prestigious" and "classier" than Dahieh (Deeb & Harb, 2013, p. 187).

The instances that Bou Akar and Harb, and Deeb write about demonstrate how citizens at the center of Beirut view those who reside in Dahieh, and these perceptions and stigmas do not exist in a vacuum but are supported by the material conditions of the Shiite sect. Part of these conditions is visible media infrastructure which results in unsatisfactory living conditions and becomes exclusive to a certain population.

While the sectarian war was fundamental in shaping the city as such, it is time to move beyond the war and start addressing the sheer class character of urban Beirut because the city's neighborhoods are not only divided according to political/religious sects but they are also divided and alienated from one another on the basis of social

class which exists within these neighborhoods that are divided along sectarian lines. Zooming in on the divisions within each urban area that is located on the margins of Beirut instead of discussing different areas across the city can lead to more class-specific observations and understandings of the city's urban logic; and because these divisions are not imaginary but in fact take material form and create material conditions, the exploration of media infrastructures in these contexts is important because they power connectivity to citizens of the alienated peripheries.

Lisa Parks poses the question: "what is it about infrastructure that is aesthetically unappealing?" (Parks, 2007, p. 346), and one of Deeb and Harb's interlocutors answered the question of why he prefers to go outside Dahieh for leisurely activities with: "[...]but the problem is the [*scenery*]. I like to go to places in Beirut where I can smoke argileh and look at the sea. It's a great view. I go to cafés here [Dahieh], and it's the same thing, same quality, same prices and all, but you don't have the [*view*]. I feel relaxed there. It's important." (Deeb & Harb, 2013, p. 189). The aesthetic aspect of media infrastructure can define experiences of space that are exclusive to the socioeconomic class it exists within. Exposed infrastructure makes an urban space unsettling and is visually distracting. The visibility of infrastructure in Dahieh for the interviewee is the only factor that makes him choose coffee shops closer to central Beirut. His choice can uncover to us that exposed infrastructure is associated with inconvenience and an unpleasant spatial experience in working-class neighborhoods.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, the three angles to this thesis are media infrastructure, piracy, and urban living. These angles will argue that the poor conditions of access coupled with the

visibility of infrastructure prompts residents to combat technological exclusion. The thesis highlights that state neglect of Beirut's marginal areas in terms of urban planning and access is purposeful to serve the center in keeping it well organized and with access to basic services.

As a result of this state neglect, other players emerge and gain control and ownership of infrastructure and *where* it functions. Political parties use the dysfunction of state neglect to monopolize ownership and subsequently, access. Political parties' control of infrastructure puts them in a powerful position to make profits and reinforce their dominance, but it also puts them in critical positions that are protested against when the monopolized services fail to provide.

Most importantly, the visibility of media infrastructure combined with its tangibility defines spatial experiences for citizens of different genders and gender identifications, because rigging media infrastructure is not a gender-neutral activity. The repetition of hard-piracy acts by heteronormative men within neighborhoods makes this kind of labor a male-dominated one which adds another layer to the experience of space, one that not only has to do with piracy acts but with *who* conducts them.

Additionally, the thesis will not be written without critically analyzing the hegemonic economic order in which we live. Capitalism's impact on access, otherizing, urban planning, and alienating communities will be studied to give the thesis a solid ground to first, understand our material surroundings and second, to conclude what these conditions mean and how they shape quotidian lives. Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the question of **in what ways does the visibility of media infrastructure in Beirut's peripheries draw a class experience of space that is intertwined with hard-piracy?**

CHAPTER II

HARD-PIRACY IN PERIPHERAL BEIRUT

The source of our access to infrastructure, media, and basic services determines where they stand on the spectrum of in/formality. While the state's provision of such services is considered formal, alternative sources are deemed as informal, even when these are more prevalent than the former. In peripheral Beirut, namely Dahieh, residents are infrastructurally alienated, meaning that the services that residents of central Beirut have are not relatable to those on the periphery. This prompts these residents to think of ways to circumvent this reality and take matters into their own hands to *create* their access. These performances that pursue access need skill and social mobility. When community members are faced with state neglect, they rely on each other to attain basic services. This, in turn, affects the social dynamics that exist in these areas.

Furthermore, what makes these performances possible, is the fact that the infrastructure is visible and exposed in peripheral Beirut which makes it easier to manipulate them. The visibility of infrastructure in areas like Dahieh also challenges the assumed invisibility of infrastructure that is common among researchers in North America and Europe.

Additionally, because injustice is never random but targeted and systemic, state neglect of infrastructure in areas like Dahieh occurs because peripheral urban areas house working-class residents whom the state clearly deems unworthy of the same access enjoyed by those living in the center. The equation of inaccessibility to basic services due to state neglect and the visibility of infrastructure in Dahieh prompt residents to pursue "material survival" (Harvey, 1996, p. 212), to use David Harvey's

words. In this chapter, I will argue that the visibility of media infrastructure facilitates its piracy and rigging by Dahieh residents as a way to cope with unsatisfactory conditions of access to technological services such as electricity, WiFi connections, and cable T.V. I also bring up the notions of hard and soft piracy and how they work together so that neighborhoods south of Beirut can ensure a semi-decent access to media services.

Media piracy is one way in which people pursue material survival. Our current understanding of piracy in the Media Studies field has for the most part concerned itself with topics of intellectual property, trade, and distribution. Ramon Lobato (2012) understands piracy as "an alternative distribution system for media content" that has its history and economic functions and is implicated in the distribution of knowledge and information. Pirated media is not a sidelined way to access and produce knowledge and information. On the contrary, piracy in many parts of the world is the standard way of accessing not only media but basic infrastructural services as well. It is the very fact that people of the Global South have to constantly attend to their sources of access to maintain and repair them that makes these consumers aware of their overlooked positions within the mediated world. This understanding does not only emerge from watching pirated blockbusters and being excluded by major media distribution companies. People's understanding of media comes from the acts that have to be performed regularly in order to access media and basic technological services. The Global South is not passive nor docile when it comes to consuming pirated media simply because this kind of consumption needs rigorous attention and maintenance before media consumption takes place, and this is done through hard-piracy.

Essential parts of securing media access in urban Lebanon include wire rigging and receiver hacking. These processes require physical labor and expertise to rig the wires and/or hack the receivers to access electricity and media channels respectively. The latter processes cannot be actualized before the former since one would need running electricity to watch T.V. Lobato broadly defines piracy as “the movement of media through time and space” (Lobato, 2012, p. 2). What facilitates this movement *are* infrastructures; be it roads, electricity, or WiFi connections. For instance, official subscriptions for television channels like Disney and OSN are costly for most people living in Dahieh. So, consumers resort to their local satellite dish provider who sells *reassembled* receivers that have *manually installed* servers inside them allowing them to penetrate these channels. These servers first find the satellite that the channel is on and then continue to unlock the channels using WiFi. As a result, households have access to global media productions without having to pay for official subscriptions and this is one example of how hard-piracy facilitates soft-piracy.

Thus, we cannot begin to think about the piracy and distribution of media productions before we take a look at what it takes to power these movements throughout space and time. Hard-piracy is a term that I will be using throughout this chapter to refer to infrastructural piracy that requires physical action so that basic services are attained. The term is inspired by hardware vs. software where hardware refers to everything tangible such as media objects like radios, cameras, televisions, etc. Software, on the other hand, is everything within these tangible objects that make them what they are and defines their functions and uses. The logic that this chapter follows is that hard-piracy is a prerequisite to soft-piracy.

In other words, this chapter will look at what kind of hard piracy is needed so that soft-pirated media can be consumed on a daily basis and this subsequently opens a discussion of access, state neglect, and resistance. Ramon Lobato (2014) writes:

> By invoking piracy we implicitly frame media practices, which have diverse motivations and functions, as conforming or nonconforming to standards of authorized consumption. This becomes their characteristic feature. Yet, when viewed from the vantage point of everyday practice, this is rarely the most interesting thing about them (p. 123).

This chapter hopes to take the above statement even further and adapt it to the piracy of infrastructure to hopefully entice a discussion of media piracy that takes into account the material conditions of media users who belong to low socioeconomic status in countries of the Global South. Positioning hard piracy of infrastructure, that aims towards media access, within a larger context of piracy and access can offer us a nuanced outlook on informal media consumption as a whole, one that takes into account the consumers' urban living conditions and how these affect the ways in which access is achieved.

A. Electricity in the Periphery

In peripheral Beirut an electricity-sharing system is prevalent. Residents living in certain urban areas have to physically contend with media and electricity infrastructure on a regular basis to ensure a semi-decent flow of basic services. In *Everyday Sectarianism in Lebanon (2016;2017)*, Nucho writes of a woman named Vrejouhie who lives in Sanjak camp in Bourj Hammoud, a northern Beirut periphery in Lebanon, where the government electricity is only provided for a few hours. Vrejouhie applied a technique to have a continuous flow of electricity without having to pay for a private electricity subscription (*ishtirak*). She had a neighbor on the other side of the camp and

both women had shifting turns in electricity provision; when one has state electricity the other doesn't. The neighbors "connected their electricity lines together, so that each one can access electricity when their respective side is cut. [...] with Vrejouhie's system of sharing, she could always keep her refrigerator running, unless in the unlikely event that both adjacent grids were cut [...]" (Nuchos 2016: 57).

This system of sharing is prevalent in peripheral Beirut for a reason. Beirut's peripheries such as Dahieh and Bourj Hammoud experience longer hours of electricity cuts than areas in central Beirut. Government electricity cuts last for 6 hours a day in Dahieh while areas like Hamra and Mar Mikhael have a 3-hour cut per day. It's important to note that prior to the harshest economic crisis that the country descended into at the end of 2019, longer cuts by both the government and private generators' *ishtirak* electricity affected all districts in Lebanon.

The undeniably disproportionate distribution of government electricity hours between the center and periphery is a starting point toward uncovering the classist division of Beirut by excluding the periphery from basic services. These conditions also highlight the different methods by which residents hard-pirate their access to mitigate the effects of state neglect. The difference in the duration of electricity cuts between the center and the periphery is a point of interest for this thesis because it highlights the systemic nature of these cuts keeping in mind that the peripheries' populations are made up of those belonging to low socioeconomic status.

The Lebanese government never explained why peripheral areas had fewer hours of electricity. However, Éric Verdeil (2016) speculates that it's due to financial reasons given that central Beirut's electricity users are "responsible for the highest electricity consumption in the country with little electricity theft and non-payment recorded there"

(p. 160). Additionally, major banks and hotels are located in central Beirut and their uninterrupted access to electricity is vital to the country's economy. Thus, protecting it from long hours of electricity cuts is done by supplying central Beirut with more hours of government electricity.

Residents of Dahieh, historically pro-Hezbollah, protested the uneven distribution of government electricity on January 27, 2008, which ended with nine deaths. Hezbollah's efforts to calm down popular anger ended with bringing in new generators to Dahieh which meant that more households would be able to have *ishtirak*. But, unlike electricity provided by the state, private generator electricity is more costly and is, to a bigger degree, affected by the international price fluctuations of diesel (Verdeil, 2016). What this meant for Dahieh residents was more costly or conditioned subscriptions that allow for a rationed use of electronics and appliances.

Because electricity is detrimental to local businesses and households, hard piracy is inevitable for residents. One of my interviewees whose family business in Dahieh was suffering from long hours of electricity cuts used the wire rigging method by connecting their store's wire to another wire in a nearby block where electricity hours were on a different shift. The intensified diesel shortage, which is needed to power *ishtirak*, and the soar in its prices due to Lebanon's economic crisis prompted the business owner to hook the store's wire to the other neighborhood. The business owner told me that he is aware that it is illegal to hook electricity wires, "in the law, there are rights and duties… we pay our duties but have no rights." This justification for wire hooking highlights the resident's relationship with the state. Lobato (2014) notes that piracy comes with different associations, some might illegally download a movie in protest against big

media companies, but in this case, there are no alternatives to having a semi-stable electricity flow.

Thus, the associations that come with hard piracy within Beirut's peripheral areas are access to basic services and surviving state neglect. The business owner confirmed that wire hooking does not add to the electricity bills of the user "but we only use it to light a lamp, nothing more." Another one of Lobato's definitions of piracy describes it as an economic activity that goes "untaxed, unregulated, and unmeasured" (Lobato, 2012; p. 16). And indeed, wire-rigging doesn't add to the resident's bills.

In fact, the electricity sharing system (among other hard piracy activities) is so prevalent in peripheral areas that most residents do not question it. Hard piracy is approached with a sense of normalcy; most of my interviewees seemed indifferent when I assured them that their identity would not be disclosed and said that they weren't worried about it because "everybody does it, even the government knows." This attitude towards piracy may be because of the informal introduction of diesel generators during the civil war of 1975. People relied on generators to remedy the long hours of electricity cuts and their use was later commercialized.

This informal introduction of generators did not have legal ground. In 2002, a law was introduced to draw a framework within which private generator owners were to operate, however, most owners still operate outside this mechanism. The state has been trying to regulate private generators since 2011 by introducing tariffs and meters to protect users from over-billing by owners, and because peripheral areas have longer hours of electricity cuts these measures were emphasized in these areas. Some residents living in central Beirut waived their right to have a meter installed since their generator bills were already low. Given the incompetence of the Lebanese state to provide a

continuous flow of electricity and the reliance on generators to cover more hours than the state, eliminating generators is out of the question (Salame, 2021).

Electricity is not the only pirated technological service in Dahieh. My interlocutor told me most landlords prefer renting their properties without contracts to evade taxes. The absence of a contract makes it difficult for tenants to apply for a landline telephone, which is needed for an official WiFi subscription from Ogero, the state-owned operator in Lebanon that provides telephone and broadband Internet services to residents and businesses at a lower cost than most private Internet providers. Additionally, most tenants would not ask property owners to apply for a landline since it's a complicated bureaucratic process. Thus, tenants resort to alternative sources for their WiFi connections which are illegal providers. These subscriptions are more costly than Ogero's but are still within the budget of many tenants and cost less than private Internet subscriptions. Illegal Internet providers have landline subscriptions and provide WiFi to customers also through wire hooking at a compromised speed. However, an illegal subscription is not only one of the most affordable Internet subscriptions to many, rather it is the only way to have a WiFi connection for tenants without a contract.

Relating the peculiarity of informal access in Lebanon to a larger global context, illegal media texts like music, movies, and talk shows circulate heavily in Cuba within the country on portable hard drives. "None of this content is legally purchased, but it is not piracy because there is no official discourse of intellectual property protection in Cuba [...] to make things more complicated, the Cuban state is actively involved in this informal media system, and has started encouraging and licensing local media rental businesses that have cropped up around the country: it sees this activity as a source of economic growth [...]" (Lobato, 2014). Likewise, private generator ownership in some

of Beirut's peripheral areas has to go through the approval of local political parties who try to monopolize generator ownership for profit and popular support. An owner of generators whoI interviewed about infrastructure ownership was extremely hesitant in answering whether or not a person would need to be politically affiliated to own generators and provide subscriptions. His response was that that only applies in one area of Dahieh, which is contradicting what an interlocutor has told me about ownership.

This evokes us to question if wire rigging can be considered piracy and challenges the current definitions we have of piracy in the Media Studies field. The lines between formal and informal, legal and illegal electricity provision are blurred in Lebanon's case. The state is aware of the residents' maneuverings to access electricity but does not actively do anything to halt these efforts. Thus, it may be appropriate to define piracy as urban performances carried out to maneuver the unsatisfactory living conditions that alienate marginalized communities from access to information, media consumption, and basic services.

B. Hard-piracy and Kinship

Nancy Munn (1986), argues that socio-cultural practices create the spacetime in which they occur and practitioners are therefore constantly producing their own spacetime. Power outages control residents' time and what gets to move throughout space. Thus, hard-piracy for residents of Dahieh is one way to reclaim their spacetime and circumvent state neglect.

To do that, residents need to know *how* to maneuver around infrastructural failure and *who* to contact for alternative sources of service provision. One of the residents who I spoke with about the process of hooking wires said that "the first thing you need is a

6mm wire and then the bravery to climb up an electric tower… you need to go to a block that you know has a different turn in government electricity than your block and then you climb one of their electric towers and connect the 6mm to the first or second wire after that you bring your 6mm all the way back your building and connect it to a separate *disjoncteur* (circuit breaker).” My conversation with this resident highlighted two things. First, is the equipment needed to pirate electricity, second is the knowledge of surrounding blocks and their government electricity hours and subsequently the residents of the other block.

Kinship is a sentiment that came up in many of my interviews. A plumber who I interviewed told me that he lives on the ground floor and that it gets unbearably hot during summer, “I can’t pay for *ishtirak* and if I were to rely on the government’s electricity, I wouldn’t know how many hours of electricity I would get per day… some days it's on for an hour and a half and other days they provide it for less than that.” The inability to pay for *ishtirak* and the instability of the government’s provision of electricity prompted him to ask the nearby small restaurant’s owner if he would share the business’s electricity with his household. “I approached him and I told them that I don’t have a stable income to pay for electricity subscription and he was willing to hook his business’s wire to my house with no problems.” This sentiment was again highlighted during a conversation with an electrician who carries out the process of wire-hooking. When I asked him if he would hook a wire from one block to another for any customer he replied “no, I only do it for people who were referred to me by family or friends… I don’t charge anything for it… I consider it a favor.”

From the above examples, it becomes clear that having connections within the community is important to access basic services. These types of “favors” for some

residents in Dahieh is a source of a semi-stable electricity flow that comes at no financial cost.

Responses to the state's neglect of a functioning infrastructure and to a seamless provision of basic connectivity services demand maneuverings by residents of Beirut's peripherals on many layers. Exposed infrastructure that is subject to piracy affects the social dynamics between community members since the government's incompetence to provide electricity is covered by "favors" provided by those with the skills to wire-hook.

C. In/visibility of Infrastructure

The longer hours of electricity cuts for those on the peripheries of the city combined with the fact that these areas house people of low socioeconomic classes called for the utilization of the visible infrastructure by the residents to escape the systematic technological exclusion that comes with living in certain urban areas.

The public's dissatisfaction with electricity cuts is no secret to the state in Lebanon. Electricity has always been a cause for concern for people living in Lebanon and during the 1920s 30s and 40s people in Beirut targeted Électricité de Beyrouth–one of the French electricity companies operating in Lebanon which came to be named as such when during the French mandate there was an increase in the industrial, commercial and domestic consumption of electricity–protested the high prices of electricity, the low-quality services, and the dire working conditions; some protests even demanded independence and evacuation of foreign troops. The protestors vandalized Électricité de Beyrouth's installations and boycotted the company's services by refraining from

electricity use. Such actions financially crippled the company as these protests would sometimes last for weeks on end.

What these instances highlight is the visibility of infrastructures in countries like Lebanon and this demonstrates how infrastructures often bear the brunt of people's retaliation against the state's incompetence and neglect. It is important to note that politicians and businessmen participated in these protests as they posed an opportunity that could advance their own political and business agendas. Boycotting electricity became difficult during the 1950s as the first ten years of independence from the French mandate Lebanon witnessed a boom in electricity production and subscribers; this was due to several factors like the industrial boom in Lebanon during World War II and the bombardment of advertisements for domestic electrical appliances and increased tourism. This boom did not mean that electricity flowed seamlessly throughout the country. A number of issues persisted like regular power outages, unstable voltage, and high prices; and as one lived farther from central Beirut, power outages started to last for longer hours (Abu-Rish, 2014).

Brian Larkin defines infrastructure as "[...] built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin, 2013, p. 328). Thus, *how* people or ideas flow throughout urban spaces and the way in which infrastructure is represented to us can determine how citizens imagine and feel about their state. When infrastructures are set up in remote areas it creates an out-of-sight-out-of-mind situation, but when they are set up in heavily populated areas it becomes almost impossible not to think about infrastructures and connect them to our daily urban experiences.

Indeed, the importance of focusing on media infrastructure and its materiality is stated in *Signal Traffic* "a focus on infrastructure brings into relief the unique *materialities* of media distribution—the resources, technologies, labor, and relations that are required to shape, energize, and sustain the distribution of audiovisual signal traffic on global, national, and local scales. Infrastructures encompass hardware and software, spectacular installations and imperceptible processes, synthetic objects and human personnel, rural and urban environments." (Parks & Starosieiski 2015: 5).

Research on infrastructure conducted in Europe and North America assumes that infrastructures are invisible until they break down or are installed in the wrong place, making it possible for infrastructure in such contexts to blend into the backgrounds of quotidian life. This understanding of infrastructure cannot be applied to the Global South where infrastructure for different services has to be contented with on a daily basis to ensure a continuous flow of basic services. In her research on infrastructure in Vietnam Lily Nguyen (2015) writes "infrastructures are only possible *in* action and only exist *as* action. Their ontology is one of perpetual performativity. This kind of infrastructural action and life creates tenuous connections that require constant attention and continual tending. The performativity of infrastructural action in the Global South is a direct response to the vulnerability of connection and to the precarity of circulation" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 642). People of the so-called third world sometimes have to take matters into their own hands, *literally*, to ensure access to basic services. I use the word literally because infrastructures in such contexts are subject to physical rigging, pirating, tampering, and other illegal practices which require physical interaction with infrastructures.

D. Infrastructures and Injustice

In "City by the Sea" (2019) Blake Atwood writes "the periphery serves the center, and never the other way around" (p.58). And indeed, people living in Dahieh have to carry the weight of the general electricity shortage in the country and have their time and money dictated by the precarious, irregular, and uneven power supply. In fact, electricity infrastructure is not the only one that is dictated by the geographies of urban areas. Atwood highlights how the garbage crisis of 2015 that covered central Beirut's streets with piles of trash was fixed by launching two landfills in Costa Brava and Bourj Hammoud, two peripheral areas located to the south and east of Beirut respectively.

It is important to note that infrastructures are used as oppression tools in many parts of the world and the state neglect experienced by those on Beirut's peripheries is not globally isolated. In Soweto, South Africa, citizens protested against the installation of prepaid water meters by the government in 2008 which were installed to supposedly facilitate service provision, produce a sense of responsible citizenship, and implement "sustainable" use of water when in reality the meters would ration people's water use and increase living expenses. The protests against the installation of water meters pointed out that these were not being installed in rich areas but rather, only in townships despite that water use per person in more wealthy areas was higher (Schnitzler, 2008).

Furthermore, in occupied Palestine, the zionist entity reinforces its dominance by ensuring the dependence of Palestinian cellular service providers on Israeli infrastructure, for reasons such as gateway provision and the need to share network transmissions with Israeli-owned companies. These measures demonstrate that the zionist state goes beyond the usage of military power to oppress Palestinians. Tawil-Souri writes "Palestinians were enclavized and largely disconnected from the

infrastructure, living under a regime that restricted both their mobility and their access to the outside world" (Tawil-Souri, 2015, p. 162).

Another example of infrastructural sabotage is the destruction of satellite dishes by the Iranian state under the pretext of protecting citizens from western imperialism. In 1994, satellite dishes were banned in Iran and in 2009 the government enforced the satellite ban and deployed special state forces to destroy and confiscate satellite dishes; these crackdowns continued throughout the following years. Despite the governmental ban, 65% of residents in Iran still managed to install satellite dishes in hidden places (Parks, 2015). Infrastructural bans are usually circumvented by people to combat the realities that these bans create. For instance, the Sowetan citizen eventually learned how to reconstruct and hack the water meter (Larkin, 2013, p. 336) and Palestinians resorted to buying two cellphones one that has an Israeli SIM card and the other a Palestinian one (Tawil-Souri, 2015 p. 169).

Moreover, classist speech that targets infrastructurally alienated areas is another way to invalidate and dismiss the basic unmet needs of those living on the periphery. In August of 2010, residents in Dahieh mobilized to demand more electricity hours. Energy and Water Minister Gebran Bassil condemned these protests and remarked that "protests against power cuts are politically motivated" and that "it is not permitted for a region where illegal hook-ups multiply to protest against power cuts" (Verdeil, 2016).

Additionally, from May to September of 2012, contractual workers of Electricity du Liban (EDL) who worked with no social benefits fought against a law that aimed to privatize EDL and make them employees of a private entity. The workers worried that this would halt the utility of the company. So, their strike that came during the hottest months of the year entailed refraining from offering repair services and retaining the

payments collected from customers led the workers to an agreement with the government that guaranteed a “facilitated recruitment procedure for their formal integration within the utility” (Verdeil, 2016).

What is most interesting about these workers, is that they were mostly Shia, i.e most of them came from the very region that Bassil described as having “illegal hook-ups.” Thus, the relationship between Dahieh residents and electricity is worth examining and can give us a class analysis of urban Beirut and infrastructural circumvention that not only requires physical know-how but also community navigation.

E. Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter aimed to argue that the performance and completion of hard piracy are what makes soft-piracy acts such as illegal downloads and online distribution possible. The conversations we have about access to media cannot be alienated from the larger discussion on infrastructure and its manipulation. We need to look at what *makes the way* for media access so that we can have a holistic outlook on informal media consumption that is determined by several factors like urban experience, socioeconomic status, labor and social dynamics.

It is not groundbreaking that state governments neglect those living on the periphery as urban setups and the distribution of basic services are determined by a capitalist logic that decides where the provision of these services will yield profit. As mentioned earlier, residents of peripheral Beirut have to carry the weight of the general electricity shortage in the country so that for-profit and touristic institutions are not affected. As a response, marginalized communities take matters into their own hands and learn how to

manipulate infrastructure or rely on other members of the community with this expertise for access.

It is important to note that this kind of resistance to state neglect should not be glorified as these residents are not actually victorious against being infrastructurally alienated even if mitigating the neglect is successful. In fact, hard piracy performances are extremely gendered since they are mainly the responsibility of cis men in the area and this reproduces patriarchal values leaving many on the sidelines of social mobility.

CHAPTER III

INFRASTRUCTURE AND GENDER

So far this thesis has tried to set the scene for what it means to reside in peripheral urban areas where media infrastructure is contented with on a daily basis to ensure a semi-continuous and decent flow of basic services. The meanings associated with infrastructural tampering are different for residents of different genders. These activities are carried out by cis male members in neighborhoods as they have the skills to tamper with wires, the connections needed for social mobility, and the confidence to publicly climb electric towers for wire-rigging purposes. Although women in Dahieh's neighborhoods *know* what wire rigging is and are aware that electricity flows to their households through the tampering efforts of their male counterparts, they rarely take an active part in carrying out infrastructural tampering. This leaves the women of these neighborhoods without the skills needed to survive infrastructural precarity and changes how the urban built environments are experienced and understood on a quotidian level.

This chapter will look at gendered experiences of urban built environments from the lens of media infrastructure and infrastructural tampering. I will argue that despite the similar material conditions surrounding residents of peripheral neighborhoods, they are perceived differently on the basis of gender and gender identification. Infrastructural tampering is tended to by cis men within these neighborhoods and this creates a particular experience of the urban space that is not relevant to the women and feminine presenting residents of these spaces. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, author Sara Ahmad (2006) writes that "bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, that are available within the bodily horizon" (p. 2).

This bodily horizon is an imaginary border that manifests in different quotidian ways such as how one occupies urban spaces, what acts are permissible for an individual in public space based on their gender, and how the inconvenience of a faulty infrastructure is perceived and handled as a result of these gendered horizons.

What this means is that even though cis men, women, and feminine identifying folks are inhabitants of the same urban space, their attention will be directed towards different objects as a result of their sexual and gendered identity. Doreen Masey (1994) writes that our senses of spaces and places are "gendered in a myriad different ways, which vary between cultures and over time. And this gendering of space and place both reflects *and has effects back on* the ways in which gender is constructed and understood in the societies in which we live" (p. 186). And indeed, the way that gender is understood in relation to infrastructure in Dahieh highlights which social and economic areas are permissible for women to be present and active in and which are not.

A. Gender Construction in Relation to Infrastructure

Feminist scholars such as Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir wrote about gender performativity and how the repetition of these performances defines gender in a given space and at a given time. What I aim to do in this chapter is apply these theories to the performances of infrastructural pirating and scratch the surface to reach an understanding of what it means to *not* perform pirating activities due to clearly defined gender performative acts. Such an understanding can help us in drawing links between physical media labor and its relation to gender and space building and understand how exposed infrastructure plays a part in defining gender constructions.

de Beauvoir's famous quote that argues "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman" (1949) is a good starting point. The acts that constitute being a woman in Dahieh do not entail infrastructural pirating. In fact, carrying out these performances and running businesses of infrastructural pirating, such as the reassembling of receivers, pirating TV channels, and providing illegal Internet connections mentioned in chapter two, are "male-dominated" fields, so to say. Throughout my interviewees and research, I only came across one woman who is an electrical engineer and performs wire rigging for residents. I learned about her from two women who live together and work at a thrift store in Dahieh and told me that they rely on her for any electricity-related matters. "She is a very good engineer and always helps us out, we don't need to contact men when something stops working at our house."

Although women in Dahieh do not attempt to fix or rig infrastructure, they know *who* to call when pirated access was interrupted. This mostly ranged from male relatives to well-known technicians within the neighborhood. Residents of Dahieh continuously rely on men with the needed skills, social mobility, and confidence to gain access to electricity that the state does not provide and consume media that would otherwise be unaffordable to many households.

The continuous reliance of women living in Dahieh on their male counterparts to perform infrastructural piracy and run businesses to support it gives male bodies closer social and economic proximity to infrastructure and subsequently, access. Mearleau-Ponty argues that the body is not a "natural species" but rather "an historical idea" (1974) i.e, what bodies come to embody within social contexts is defined by the repetition of acts that give cultural meanings and performative possibilities to bodies. The construction of gender in relation to infrastructural pirating is defined by the

repetition of these performances by male residents in the neighborhoods of Dahieh; it is because of the repetition of these infrastructural performances by men within neighborhoods that give male bodies a history; a history of performing infrastructural pirating.

This history of male bodies in relation to infrastructural labor of course did not begin with infrastructural piracy within Dahieh. When reading Lisa Parks' 'Stuff You Can Kick" I couldn't help but notice the images accompanying her infrastructural analysis of mail sorters, power poles, and satellite dishes, are those of men conducting some sort of infrastructural labor or destruction. With the mail sorters' representation, Parks cites two 20th-century films that shed light on the labor performed by mail sorters, all of which are men. Additionally, Parks' example of satellite dishes discusses the Iranian government's deployment of police officers to confiscate and destroy satellite dishes as an enforcement of the satellite dish ban. The photos of male police officers destroying and confiscating the dishes positions the male body, in this case, as the inhibitor of access.

Thus, just like the male body can be positioned as the facilitator of access by building, fixing, and maintaining infrastructure, it can also be set as the impeder of access to media by the destruction of the very media objects that call upon male bodies for its installment and maintenance. The position of the male body as both the facilitator and the impeder of media access is reflective of a larger social and economic conceptualization of gender and gender roles, and media infrastructure and distribution are not exempted from these reflections. Just like the male body is positioned as the provider of income, security, and in this case access to electricity, the male body also has the social authority to halt access at any moment.

In Parks' second example, which is the most interesting to this thesis, power pole workers made up of African American and Latino men, some of which lost their jobs during the 2008 U.S recession, are seen in the images performing their labor that involves physical contention with infrastructure. This example not only shows the physical proximity of male bodies to infrastructure as they climb, carry, and rig power poles but also highlights that it's the working-class laborers who contend with infrastructure the most for reasons such as information distribution, media consumption, and connectivity. It is this relation of gender and class to infrastructure that this chapter is interested in. An analysis of such relations can help us in understanding how media production and consumption are actualized and who are the behind the scenes actors that fulfill access through physical media labor. While a class analysis of media infrastructure can uncover how media labor fits into reproducing capitalist modes of production, a gendered analysis of media infrastructure can help in critiquing how individuals understand the mediated world around them.

Furthermore, because male bodies are in closer proximity to media infrastructure, then male bodies and media distribution are associated with one another. Blake Atwood's work on the underground life of videocassettes in Iran at a time when the Iranian government had a strict ban on these media objects highlights how the video dealers, or "video-men", moved within cities from door to door to sell video cassettes is another example of how the male body is in closer proximity to "underground" media infrastructure. Atwood's study highlights how the movement of these men with videocassettes hidden in their briefcases and trench coats was a form of media distribution. This is similar to the distribution of pirated access to electricity, Internet, and TV channels within Dahieh which is facilitated by men who possess the needed

skills to fix or set up pirated access and social mobility and popularity to be called upon when such services are needed. In both these cases, male bodies act as distributors of media and facilitate access to it. Thus, when access to media is unsatisfactory it becomes the male body's role to provide it through illegal means.

Bordieu (1977) in his analysis of the north African Kabyle where spatiality and temporality are organized to reflect the social order by assigning certain people to certain activities, notes that the role of women is defined by their presence in certain spaces at certain times. The reason behind women's un-involvement in laborious infrastructural activities is a historical one. With the development of capitalism, the nuclear family that functions on patriarchal and economic productivity deemed women as more useful to its maintenance by childbirth. Thus, women were given the role of the house-makers who produce more manpower for the development of capitalism. Additionally, if women within working-class societies had a dependence on generating income and ensuring their access, then the nuclear family and the social perception of men as providers would abate.

It is precisely the *absence* of women's bodies when infrastructure breaks down, or in Atwood's study, when access to media consumption is scrutinized by the state, that reinforces the "bodily horizon" that Sara Ahmad writes about which is discussed at the beginning of this chapter. The clearly defined bodily horizon is what allows the male body to attend to infrastructural failure in Dahieh and it is why it is socially acceptable for men to be seen on electrical towers performing an illegal activity. It is important to make it clear that this thesis is not implying that the fact that men can perform such illegal activities is empowering. In fact, the close proximity of working-class men in Dahieh to rigging media infrastructure as a result of state neglect is why Energy and

Water Minister Gebran Bassil felt entitled to criticize and condemn Dahieh's resident's protests against power cuts (Verdeil, 2016) (see chapter two page 36).

It is the proximity of working-class male bodies to infrastructural piracy or other kinds of illegal activities that try to evade unsatisfactory living conditions that makes it easy for the general rhetoric to villainize working-class people, especially men. The women I interviewed in Dahieh about pirated access did not share the sentiment of indifference to the anonymity that was common among the men I interviewed. Out of the five women I spoke with, only one permitted a voice recording and the rest preferred to have their interviews be written. This says a lot about how women within neighborhoods feel about illegal access. They approach it cautiously which sets women's bodies even farther from infrastructural pirating.

B. Hard and Soft Piracy in Media Distribution

Further, to relate media distribution and male bodies to the concepts of hard and soft piracy discussed in chapter two, it's interesting to note that both hard and soft piracy are carried out by men in Dahieh, making all steps to media distribution and access reliant on the male body and this reliance defines what is socially and economically permissible for it. Chapter two mentioned that tenants in Dahieh resort to illegal WiFi subscriptions due to complications in getting contracts; the illegal businesses providing such connections are establishments that are owned and run by men within Dahieh neighborhoods. A distributor of illegal WiFi, who is not technologically literate, is popular in several neighborhoods in Dahieh. He hires other men to set up routers and rig wires to provide access to customers. The workforce is made up of a telecommunications engineer, a computer scientist, a customer service person, two

technicians, and four errand boys who are underage Syrian refugees. This illegal business, with a legitimate front, has a strong economic and social position across different neighborhoods in Dahieh. The popularity of this Internet provider and the fact that the owner and employees are men reinforces the piracy field as a male-dominated one. It creates a strong cultural and social association between male bodies and access to media and the ways in which it is distributed.

Additionally, during my conversation with one of these employees who agreed to speak with me about the business; the sentiment of indifference to anonymity came up once again, as it did with the satellite-hacking business owner. After the employee made it clear that he was not too concerned with anonymity, I asked him why that is and he replied “this network involves people that are much more powerful than I am, I won’t be held accountable before they do.” Whether this is true or not, the indifference to anonymity highlights how people feel about the state and about political parties’ active part in the piracy business. The conditions of access to media consumption and basic services also shape how citizens feel about their state and residents come to have certain associations with their status of access.

Moreover, this all-men illegal WiFi business gives us an example of how media access and distribution are made to concern men on both economic and social levels. In fact, jobs that require fixing, building, or maintaining infrastructure such as road construction, trash collection, infrastructural installment, etc., are dominated by working-class men; and this is not to say that emancipation of working-class women will be achieved when they are able to enter these jobs, instead, it is to say that the male body is always placed in closer social and economic proximity to infrastructure which

reproduces the conceptualization of men being providers; and in this context, of media access and distribution.

C. Gendered Media Associations

When infrastructures are set up in remote areas it creates an out-of-sight-out-of-mind situation, but when they are set up in heavily populated areas it becomes almost impossible not to think about infrastructures and connect them to our daily urban experiences. Because of media infrastructure ubiquitousness in the neighborhoods of Dahieh, it can be argued that they are masculine performing media objects. Jonathan Sterne (2006) argues that the mp3 is a feminine media object because they are "container technologies" which Zoe Sofia (2000) describes as "unobtrusive and . . . make their presence felt, but not noticed." These attributes do not apply to media infrastructure in Dahieh. As made clear hitherto, media infrastructure is visible and makes their presence felt not only through their ubiquitousness, but through the inconvenience they cause, and when that occurs, affected residents think of a male technician or relative who can attend to the failure. Women's bodies are not thought of when infrastructure breaks down because women's bodies are historically not associated with the kind of labor. Instead, "female occupations" is concerned with "[c]ooking, milking, dyeing, tanning, brewing, gardening [...]" the tools for feminine domains of labor are different than masculine labor tools, such as hammers, for example, or in this case, the 6mm wire needed to rig electricity mention in chapter two in.

To make gendered domains of labor relevant to this thesis, it's interesting to highlight that the illegal WiFi business' office, where the tools needed are wires, computers, routers, etc. is located in front of a women's beauty salon whose glass doors are covered

with jet black opaque stickers of women with their makeup and hair done. Inside this salon are different tools to facilitate the technicians' labor like tweezers, threads, wax machines, blow dryers, an array of combs and brushes, nail polish, etc. What this mundane observation offers is first, the comparison of labor tools needed for each business which shows how feminine and masculine domains of labor reinforce assumed gender roles. Second, the different skill sets women and men possess make up the economic activities within Dahieh. The owner of the women's saloon seemed completely opposed to the idea of women performing infrastructural tampering or fixes when I told her that I heard about a woman electrical engineer who performs infrastructural activities that are usually reserved for men because it is an "intricate job and women don't have the intellect and emotional capacity to perform such a job." It was interesting for a saloon owner to say this while not denying that her own job has its own level of skill and precision. "Of course I have to pay attention to detail so that my customers are happy, but this is different from an electrical technician's job" and when I asked how being a saloon owner and an electrical technician is different she replied with "working as an electrical technician is risky and more knowledge is needed to perform that job" she later told me that the exposed wires worry her, especially when they go loose and fall down, which is why she might have been very stern about her opinion.

A tailor whose shop is not too far from the salon was on the other side of the spectrum, she told me that she relies on herself to do everything "the exposed wires make the scenery disgusting here and they are dangerous… I don't wait for anyone to fix these things for me because the wires worry me" I told her that not many women I've spoken with share this opinion to which she replied "this is what people are used to but I don't agree with it… I was once injured because of an exposed wire that fell on my

balcony and immediately fixed it myself… If I had waited for an electrician, someone else could've gotten injured like me."

Furthermore, the business owner's (who relies on pirated electricity mentioned in chapter two) wife who also works at the store told me that she does not know how the business gets its electricity and said that "my husband handles things related to the electricity, I don't know much about that." But, after further discussion with her and telling her that almost all households and businesses rely on pirated electricity, she told me that "it is the state's fault that people resort to pirated electricity, if the government can ensure citizens with a 24-hour electricity flow, no one would want to steal electricity. Her initial refusal to tell me that she knew of the pirated electricity in the store feeds into what was mentioned earlier in this chapter about women approaching this topic with more caution than men. When I asked the tailor about what she thinks of pirated access she said "I am completely against it… it is illegal and against religion… I would not resort to it" I asked her if she thinks people pirate access out of desperation she said "for some, the ends justify the means, especially in this country."

The business owner *knows* that electricity pirating is illegal but his justification is made against the unfulfilled rights of residents by the state. This business owner doesn't carry out the process of electricity pirating himself. His pirated access was made possible by an electrician who used his skills to hook the business' wires. I want to argue here that *knowing* and *performing* give rise to the different associations that a resident has with infrastructure. Drawing on the Causal Theory of Knowledge by Goldman (1967), the business owner *knew* his access to electricity was pirated because of either perceptual connections i.e he *saw* the electrician perform the wire hacking process, or because his business has a light bulb that is not affected by the random

electricity cuts and is unbilled. Meanwhile, the electrician knows this certain business has pirated electricity because it was his *performance* that allowed for this access. These different gendered associations matter because the same source of access to infrastructure and media can mean different things to different residents. A focus on media associations that are produced as a result of access status can prove beneficial in audience studies and in understanding how different media consumers understand media and their position within the mediated world. By examining these associations, the field can produce different categories for audiences and how each perceives media and media productions as a whole.

Additionally, Sara Ahmad writes that the way bodies inhabit space is how they reach for objects and that "[w]e do not have to think where to find such objects; our knowledge is implicit and we reach toward them without hesitation" (p. 110). The "knowledge" of male electricity technicians in Dahieh to perform hard-piracy is made possible because of social protocols that normalized these activities to the male body. Ahmad also writes that "objects extend bodies [...] they also seem to measure the competence of bodies and their capacity to "find their way" (p. 110). And indeed, media infrastructure as objects extend themselves to the male bodies; bodies that have the "competence" and "capacity" to attend to them at times of failure.

I bring up the topics of knowing and performing because I want to relate them to deeper connections and associations that one forms on the basis of gender and gender identification. Nadine Labaki's *Caramel* (2007) briefly portrays how gender identity and infrastructure are negotiated when infrastructure fails to provide the services it was meant to. The movie follows four women who work at a beauty salon as they navigate aging, dating, sex, and love. One of these characters, Rima, is a lesbian butch whose

love interest visits the salon regularly to get her hair done by Rima. On one of these occasions, the generator switches off and out of these four women, it is Rima who has to contend with the generator to switch it back on. The breakdown of the generator interrupted an intimate moment with Rima's love interest because of her gender performativity and the expectation of her friends to avert this inconvenience.

Here, Rima performed an infrastructural fix and her associations differ from the other three women. Her association at that moment is of inconvenience and frustration as it disrupted a tender moment because she had to *perform* the fix. Whilst her co-worker's associations with this breakdown have to do with not only the infrastructural breakdown but also with the *knowledge* that Rima would turn the generator back on. Thus, the other women's associations with infrastructural breakdown are not only of inconvenience but also of Rima, the fixer of the generator's breakdowns. As a result, Rima's male performativity places her body in closer proximity to infrastructure.

This fictional media representation of gender and gender identification's relationship to infrastructure and electricity in Lebanon reflects realities of material conditions that affect residents in ways based on gender and on the ways in which they can or are willing to handle the inconveniences caused by unsatisfactory conditions of basic services.

D. Conclusion

This chapter aimed to highlight how the experiences of urban spaces are drawn out of not only the material conditions that make up space but also of one's social position within said spaces. Although women and men in Dahieh are both affected by the unsatisfactory conditions of electricity in the southern suburb, their experiences of space

and of these state shortcomings are different because of their gender. The ways in which women and men exist in Dahieh are dictated by "bodily horizons" that make these residents direct their attention to certain things while ignoring others.

In Dahieh, many factors come into play that define gender. One of these ways is the body's social and economic proximity to media infrastructure or infrastructure as a whole. The fact that businesses related to infrastructural pirating are exclusively owned by men makes infrastructure associative with the male body. It is because of this that the saloon owner might have been so opposed to the idea of a woman being an electrical technician. Her opinion on this doesn't exist in a vacuum but is drawn from what is socially and economically normalized within peripheral neighborhoods. The reliance on the male body by default to fix or rig electricity not only gives the male body closer proximity to infrastructure but to illegal activities as well. In this way, specific rhetoric is popular in Beirut concerning Dahieh, and people outside this periphery are quick to associate the area with illegal activities, overlooking the fact that the material conditions within this area impose the eventual illegal contention with infrastructure to ensure access to electricity.

The history of the male body as the hacker of electricity in Dahieh sets these bodies as the providers of media access or access to technology in general and this feeds into a larger capitalist and patriarchal values of gender constructs that manifests in different quotidian ways.

CHAPTER IV

THE POLITICS OF SPACE

One of the several threads I kept pulling at during my research was a quote I read in *Leisurely Islam* (2013) by Lara Deeb and Mona Harb. The book included interviews with youths of Dahieh and their experiences outside of Dahieh, specifically in central Beirut. The quote was an answer to why the interviewee preferred to go outside Dahieh for leisurely activities "[...]but the problem is the [*scenery*]. I like to go to places in Beirut where I can smoke argileh and look at the sea. It's a great view. I go to cafés here [Dahieh], and it's the same thing, same quality, same prices and all, but you don't have the [*view*]. I feel relaxed there. It's important." (Deeb & Harb, 2013, p. 189). This point of view raised many questions for me. What "view" made this person unrelaxed in Dahieh? What elements of space made him prefer to go to central Beirut seeking a relaxing leisurely time? How exactly does a space contribute to the experience of feelings? What is the history behind these relaxing and un-relaxing urban spaces? And what role did political factors and social and economic class hierarchy play in defining how these spaces are experienced?

Additionally, I will bring up the topics of political power and war and how access to electricity, WiFi, cable, and other necessary services are subject to a sudden halt due to maintenance, economic, and political reasons. Because private providers of the aforementioned services are in many cases politically affiliated, this reflects on the state of access during politically contested times. The seamlessness of such services depends not only on the customers' abilities to pay their private providers in a timely manner but also on political stability on the neighborhood and national levels.

Thus, how can access to services that are constantly being done and undone build people's relationship to their access and their areas of living? How do people cope with this uncertainty? Who do they go to, if at all, when access to basic services is halted? In the specific case of Dahieh, temporal living is also induced by the fact that the area is the target of Israeli aggression during times of war; and answering how the baseline possibility of war on Dahieh affects people's relationship with their homes can forge an understanding of how residents feel about their threatened surroundings, how willing they are in pursuing permanent fixes to their access sources, and what is the imagined future for this area and its conditions of access to basic services. In "Temporariness Takes Command: How Temporary Urbanism Re-Assembles the City" Stevens writes "[i]f a temporary use looks bad, does not work or fails economically, it does not matter much, because it will be gone soon enough" (Stevens, 2020). This research has already established that residents of Dahieh approach pirated access with normalcy and indifference but we have yet to discuss the attitudes of residents towards the consistency of both their private and pirated access.

The questions mentioned earlier are some of which I aim to answer in this chapter and some were used to direct the logic and research direction of this chapter. I draw the core of my argument about space and place from de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). His definition of space is useful in building the ground from which the thesis takes off: "It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities." (de Certeau 1984: p.117). While place adopts a more static character: "is an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of

stability" (p. 117). From de Certeau's definitions, I want to assume that residents of Dahieh take the role of "mobile elements" while media infrastructure assumes the role of "stable" objects in neighborhoods. Through my application of this theory on Dahieh and its spatial elements, I want to analyze how the experience of space is created, how feelings about a certain place come to be, and how the association of different places is drawn and on what basis.

In *The Production of Space* (1974), Henri Lefebvre writes "humans as social beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world." Through hard piracy of infrastructure in Dahieh, the life, consciousness, and world of residents are actualized as a result of their piracy activities. The access that comes as a result of hard-piracy is a product of labor; a labor which after performing time and time again begins to define people's relationships and feelings about spaces where access has to be pirated.

It is important to also keep in mind that this kind of media labor would not have taken place if Dahieh had fulfilled access by the government. Thus, the experience of space in the neighborhoods of Dahieh emerges from the hard-piracy of media infrastructure and the state neglect that prompts residents to carry out these activities. In this sense, the urban experience of neighborhoods in Dahieh is not only affected by visible media infrastructure but by state neglect as well.

A. A History of Neglect

This history of what Dahieh looked like is a utopian past dream that elder residents reminisce about. My grandmother tells me the same story again and again of how Dahieh was covered with greenery and orange trees, "look at it now, it's dirty and

noisy." The reason behind Dahieh's changing face from a vast green land to an urban jungle is one that is relevant for most issues in Lebanon: the civil war. Initially, Dahieh, more specifically Haret Hreik, was a Christian-populated area. This changed during the civil war when these families evacuated the area en masse and sold their houses to Shiite families who were fleeing conflict in the southern part of the country or other Beirut areas such as Nabaa where Christian militias were starting to take control. Shiite developers saw this as an opportunity towards modernization and urbanization and had the freedom of experimenting with buildings as the country was in a state of chaos building regulations were lenient. The years 1978, 1979 up to the early 80s were the years of urbanization boom to Haret Hreik as movie theaters, malls, and buildings started to sprout up. Another boom was right after the civil war. This is because developers were anticipating a building law, which was passed in 1994 (Sewell, 2021). And this is partly why Dahieh looks the way that it does with buildings so close to each other that sometimes the view windows would be blocked by another building's wall, roads and narrow alleyways that a newcomer would definitely get lost in, and pavements that are occupied by local shops who feel entitled to the space outside their stores

As discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the history behind how some areas in Dahieh came to be considered as part of Dahieh, or more politically, a Hezbollah stronghold, has a lot to do with the civil war and its aftermath on urban planning and housing in Beirut. In *For the War Yet to Come* (2018) Bou Akar explains that Sahra Choueifat, initially a Druze stronghold, later came to populate Shiites and came to be considered an extension of Hayy el-Selloum, an informal settlement in Dahieh. This came to be because buyers of apartments in new residential complex buildings were

Shiites who were war displaced and had for 30 years lived in buildings that bore the destructive effects of the civil war. They could not move out of these buildings because they would not receive the promised monetary compensation by the government if they were not formally evicted. These new buildings did not have the necessary infrastructure to allow water and electricity to reach Sahra Choueifat, and like all infrastructural shortcomings, this was solved by the community with support from Hezbollah and Harakat Amal.

Although I did not conduct my research in Sahra Choueifat, the history of how this area came to be considered as part of Dahieh and how it is socially perceived along with all other areas in Dahieh by people living outside this periphery has a lot to do with the state of infrastructure. I want to bring up the media coverage that Bou Akar includes in her work in which a Shiite resident of Sahra Choueifat expresses her frustration with the yearly flooding during the winter season as a result of a faulty sewage system: "If the people who were suffering from these horrible living conditions were Christians, the pipe would have been fixed tomorrow, not in six years. Just because we are Shiites, we have to take this dirt." (Bou Akar, 2018, p. 75).

Whether this is true or not, it is interesting that this resident associated her sect with faulty infrastructure and state neglect, and Christians were associated with the opposite. These associations are not concluded in a vacuum. The social and economic stigmatization of Dahieh and its people still exists to this day. And this is due to many factors including state neglect, the urban conditions of Dahieh, the cheaper price range of rent and food items as compared to other areas, and the fact that Dahieh is associated with violence and armory given that Hezbollah is the only party that did not give up its

weapons to the Lebanese government at the end of the civil war for self-defense reasons against Israel.

Infrastructure in Dahieh has always been a target for Israeli aggression against the area. In fact, one of the first military aggressions against Dahieh at the beginning of the 2006 war was destroying bridges that connected Dahieh to the southern city of Sidon in an attempt to isolate it (KUNA, 2006). Additionally, in the recent dispute between Hezbollah and Israel regarding gas drilling in Karish, a Palestinian-Lebanese marine border, the Minister of Finance of the Israeli occupation aid that in case of escalation, “we will wipe out Dahieh” (Akhbar Al Yawm, 2022).

Combining the facts that Dahieh faces state neglect when it comes to its infrastructure, being Israel's go-to target during war, and the labor performed by electricity technicians to pirate electricity comes as a response to both state neglect and the faulty infrastructure as a result of war, experiences of this space are produced as a result. One of my interviewees said that “our relationship to our home (Dahieh) is temporary because it’s always under threat of being brought down.” And indeed, the fixes and hacking that residents do ensure electricity and WiFi are all temporary solutions that are at risk of being cut by the state at any time.

B. War and Autonomy

The most recent war between Israel and Hezbollah broke out in July of 2006. The famous quote by the Israeli chief commander was a pledge to set Lebanon “20 years backward” and this was indeed achieved by targeting Lebanon’s vital infrastructure points such as the airport, the electricity grids, sewage systems, broadcast channels, etc. International, state, and political efforts were put into rebuilding the affected areas and

infrastructure but the consequences of the war were still felt long after it ended. In total, 250 buildings were completely destroyed with Harek Hreik, where many important Hezbollah figures reside, bearing 75% of the total destruction in Dahieh. Additionally, more than 8,000 housing units were destroyed beyond repair, and four bridges within Dahieh were hit in addition to roads inside the area (Abu Darwich, 2011). Targeting Beirut's southern suburb infrastructure by Israel is not a unique case of war tactic. However, Israel's goal with the destruction of infrastructure was not only to cripple the ability of Dahieh residents to live within the area in the future, but it was also to weaken popular support of Hezbollah (Kotia & Edu-Afful, 2014), which is a social and political pillar for residents of Dahieh. This is an important observation because it highlights the socially destructive, not just material loss, that Israel was after during the 32-day war.

However, these efforts did not impact the status quo support of Dahieh residents for Hezbollah. In a news report by Hezbollah's TV broadcast channel, Al Manar, a series of interviews with passersby were conducted after the destruction of the Ghobayreh bridge. One of the people interviewed said, "if Israel thinks that these attacks will weaken residents' support of Hezbollah, then they are wrong" (Al Manar, 2018). This support, however, would be challenged during Lebanon's worst economic crisis in the country's history. In August of 2022, residents of Beit Yahoun in the southern town of Bint Jbeil witnessed road blocking by locals for three consecutive days mainly due to a shortage of water in addition to electricity, and other necessities. One of the protesters said, "we are the two most powerful political parties in the country, we have money and armory [...] and still don't have a drop of water." (Megaphone, 2022). Here, the protester connected the two political parties, Hezbollah and Harakat Amal, and their

possession of the armory to necessary services, implying that the possession of armory should guarantee the power to ensure access to the parties' areas.

The providers of basic and cable services within Dahieh are indeed powerful and have autonomy with the services they provide. On several occasions, cable distributors in Dahieh cut Al Jadeed's channel broadcast in all of Dahieh, the most recent one being in 2019. Cable providers cut Al Jadeed's broadcast in Dahieh and El Hermel because the channel called out Hezbollah and Harakat Amal's supporters on harassing its journalists and correspondents in response to Al Jadeed's supportive stance of the 2019 protests, which the two parties condemned, in the announcer introduction (Annahar, 2019). Thus, it is no surprise that residents of Dahieh associate their access to services with the two parties.

Similar to what discussed in chapter three on how the facilitator of access is the one who usually has the power to shut it down, the above example of how Al Jadeed's broadcast was cut in Dahieh and the incident mentioned in chapter three (see page 4) about the disagreement between the two providers due to territory reasons portrays how the two parties have this power and autonomy to act when it comes to media and electricity access of residents. The same power that can provide pirated access to subscription-based channels, WiFi, and electricity can halt it when its political ideologies are threatened or critiqued. It is important to reiterate that this autonomy is largely due to a weak state that only puts all its efforts into managing the center of Beirut.

C. Picky Meters

When the Lebanese government decided to launch two new landfills in response to the garbage crisis and the "You Stink" protests in 2015, it agreed on two areas that were of a similar social and economic character to Naameh, a southern area that had the landfill which filled up causing the crisis. Naamah's residents held many protests over the years to demand better access to electricity and water services but their efforts were futile (Ejtilas, 2016). Just like Costa Brava and Bourj Hammoud, to the south and east of Beirut respectively are "already polluted" areas and are not financially nor touristically significant to Lebanon. With the trash management "solution", the state showed that the living conditions of the aforementioned areas and their residents are not accounted for and the sole aim of the solution was to keep Beirut, the center, clean.

Additionally, in 2005, the government experimented with electricity meter reading by assigning private firms to collect fees, distribute bills, read meters, and detect fraud. In Chiyah and Antelias districts, a French company, EDF, was assigned. In all other districts in Beirut local firms were assigned whose owners had connections with chiefs of political parties of the area. The EDF was actually successful in completing the task in its assigned areas. Billed electricity increased to more than 50% and non-payment fell down to 4% (Verdeil, 2008). We can speculate that the state assigned the better experienced firm to peripheral areas because that is where most electricity theft and non-payment is recorded, but it must be pointed out that the Lebanese state is quick to punish these areas for pursuing material survival without reflecting on its shortcoming within these areas. This feeds into one of the main arguments of the thesis on how functional infrastructure and urban divisions follow a classist logic and condemn the resistance against state neglect.

This attitude of the state towards areas like Dahieh facilitates party-controlled conditions of accessibility and inaccessibility. The absence of the state in Dahieh gives private generator owners the liberty of pricing, providing, and power over what people can access and at which times. During a conversation with a resident, I brought up how the state neglects Dahieh in terms of urban planning to which he responded with “we are not waiting for the state to attend to our concerns.” When I asked him who do you go to when you have complaints as a citizen he said “you can try going to the municipality but they are also ineffective… the best thing you can do is talk to someone with a good position in either Harakat Amal or Hezbollah, then you will get results.” I then brought up how the two parties have autonomy in deciding who to help out and with what, to which he responded “that is just the way it is in the country… you have to make sure you have good connections to have your needs met.”

Chapter two mentions how residents of central Beirut were not keen on installing electricity meters given that their bills were not high due to the short 3-hour electricity cuts, compared to the longer cuts in Dahieh. Additionally, and despite the claims made by the Ministry of Economy and Trade in 2019 that “60% of all subscribers in Lebanon have installed meters, and that subscribers’ invoices have almost been reduced by half” (Ahmad, 2020), this doesn’t reflect the reality, especially for those living in areas close to central Beirut. In order to put things in perspective, I asked 10 residents of central Beirut living in Hamra, Mar Elias, Badaro, Achrafieh, and Mar Mikhael whether they have an electricity meter installed or not and eight of them replied no. Many of them blamed it on Beirut’s Municipality and two of those residents tried to complain. The first complained that her provider refused to install meters, for which the municipality did not take responsibility, and responded that they do not regulate private generators

because they consider them illegal, which falls in contradiction to the responsibility of municipalities to implement a tariff and metering regulations in accordance with the decision made by the Lebanese government in 2011 to regulate the private generator market; a decision who's implementation only started taking place in 2018 when the Ministry of Economy and Trade declared electricity meters compulsory to all private generator subscriptions.

Some residential buildings in central Beirut have their own generator and as a result, tenants are not burdened with having to find their subscriptions. In these cases, a meter is indeed installed and charges tenants according to their electricity usage instead of their amp subscription. But this arrangement can also be manipulated by landlords. The second resident who complained to the municipality did so because her landlord, who had a meter installed, was charging more per kilowatt than other buildings or private providers in the area. The municipality also did not take responsibility for this and told the resident that they cannot do anything because "the landlord has private ownership of the generator and we cannot dictate how he chooses to price his services."

The case of meters and pricing in Dahieh is different. Most residential buildings have two meters (Figure 3 and 4), one that counts subscription electricity and one that counts government-provided electricity. However, this does not always mean fair pricing of the former.

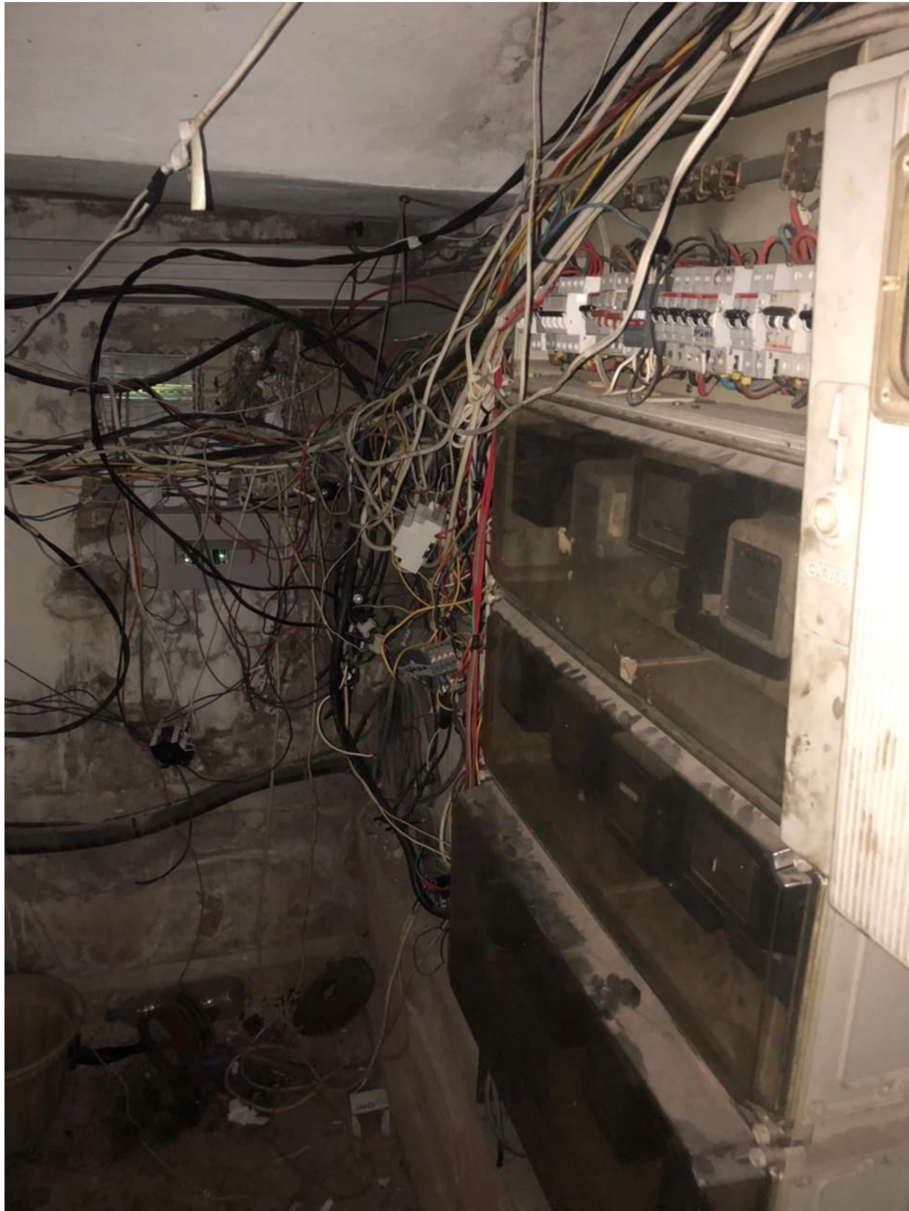

Figure 3. Meters of a building, second shelf.

(Photo by Danah El Kaouri)

Figure 4. Subscription meters.

(Photo by Danah El Kaouri)

When I asked a young woman whose building had a meter if she thinks her *ishtirak* provider is being fair with his pricing, she said that "there's no way we're spending as much as he claims… we can't keep our AC on in this heat and only keep the fridge running with a couple of light bulbs… how does that add up to 311 dollars? And he has

the audacity to demand we pay dollars… he is a thief… all providers are just a big cartel.” This frustration with providers and unfair pricing was prominent among residents in Dahieh. The Dahieh Municipality Association Facebook group posts an updated price list of kilowatt prices and the comment section on these posts is filled with complaints and comical comments about how none of the providers are abiding by these price lists. The comments criticized the municipalities and the lack of action they are taking about the pricing. One comment stressed that the neglect affects users the most and highlighted and implied that most of the people's incomes are spent to pay for subscriptions: "This is all talk that no one abides by… we're the ones affected… we have to work just to pay the provider may god never forgive him." Another comment highlighted how residents of Dahieh are neglected by both the municipality and the state: "you [referring to the municipality] know that the state does not care about the people of Dahieh and we used to count on you but unfortunately, you're not taking any action and are leaving the people of Dahieh for the mafias…" Other comments wrote that the providers are refusing to install meters, although as mentioned earlier this would not guarantee fair pricing. And because people are well aware that generator owners are not being fair with prices even with a meter installed, some of them respond to this injustice by pirating the meter to make it count less than the actual amount of electricity being used by loosening the wires.

D. Conclusion

Spaces, like everything else, are political and this becomes more relevant when the spaces in question are looked down upon by the state in terms of services provided. The quote mentioned at the beginning of this chapter about "relaxing" spaces outside of

Dahieh could have a lot to do with the fact that the urban aesthetics of Dahieh are not organized in a way that would make one feel at ease. This is a result of haphazardly built infrastructure that is both visible and reachable to residents. The unappealing urban aesthetics in Dahieh are undeniable characteristics of the area that result in more random mushrooming of buildings and infrastructure and the social stigmatization of those living in Dahieh.

Political parties have a vital role to play when it comes to filling the gaps in service provision by the state. These parties benefit socially and economically as providers who have the liberty of provision and non-provision. To make the definition of spaces in Dahieh more layered, Israeli aggression is constantly in pursuit of threatening stability through armed attacks or verbal threats against Dahieh. This alone is an important factor that plays into how spaces are built, rebuilt, and experienced.

It is because of state neglect, party control, and the possibility of war that citizens eventually end up having to rig access to services. It is interesting to observe how these three factors prompt residents to perform piracy activities and contribute to built environments and what entails them. What is also interesting about Dahieh is its history, Daheih's urban conditions and its demographic came to be as a result of the civil war that made Christians sell their houses and leave the area. The owners were replaced by Shiite families who were fleeting southern areas that had come under the control of Christian militias (Sewell, 2021). This raises the question, would Daheih be infrastructurally ignored if it was still a Christian area that is not a Hezbollah stronghold? From the media coverage mentioned earlier about the yearly flooding during the winter season, we would think that a Christian neighborhood would not suffer these infrastructural failures, but that is not entirely true. Other areas in Beirut do

face challenges when it comes to the provision of everyday services, but not to the same extent as Dahieh residents. What sets Dahieh apart from other areas in Beirut is its economic character which is associated with being low class and the absence of the state given its weakness and political parties' ultimate power and autonomy in managing the area.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have uncovered how the experience of urban spaces is three-fold. First, it is defined by one's socioeconomic status, second, by the visibility of infrastructure, and third, by how residents use this visibility for their own advantage. The physical characteristics of urban spaces can tell us a lot about the socioeconomic classes of the area houses, their demographics, and conditions of access to utility services. In Dahieh, these physical markings include the exposed wires, among other things. The ways in which urban spaces are set up can also highlight the state's attitude toward specific areas and can show how critical the examination of these areas is when we are trying to draw a deeper understanding of how they fit into larger capitalist frameworks of how societies are set up. The omnipresence of wires and the patched and compromised conditions of access for those on the periphery prompt residents to think of ways in which they are able to secure access to basic services, connectivity, and media consumption.

Working around infrastructural realities in Dahieh entails physically contending with different media and infrastructural objects such as receivers, satellite dishes, wires, and circuit breakers; and this is a kind of media piracy that the field has yet to explore in connection to other factors such as urban spaces and how they are experienced *as a result* of the state of access and infrastructure. I refer to this type of piracy as hard-piracy because I want this work to shed light on the different types of piracy that exist within working-class urban landscapes. The media studies field has to a great extent benefited from studies that tackle pirating video games, songs, and movies, (eg: Klinger,

2010; Papadimitriou, 2018), which I refer to as soft-piracy, but we have yet to look at the physical piracy of how things are set up to alter realities of access and how it extends to other fields such as urban studies. The differentiation between hard and soft piracies is to bring attention to how these two are intertwined. Soft-piracy occurs when some sort of hard-piracy activity has preceded it. For instance, in order for residents to have access to subscription-based T.V channels, the receiver would have to be reassembled to install a server inside it allowing it to unlock these channels.

With Lebanon's harshest economic crisis yet, coupled with the worldwide soar in fuel prices hard-piracy activities have only increased. As the world becomes more mediated under capitalism, it is not surprising to see those on the periphery being further alienated from connectivity and access to media, just as they are pushed to the margins of other services like healthcare and education. Thus, the "struggle for material survival" now includes being connected and having access to worldwide events and media productions, and for some, this can only be achieved through hard-piracy.

The idea of hard-piracy also comes to challenge the generalized knowledge about infrastructure being invisible or only becoming visible when it breaks down. This line of thinking is prevalent among studies conducted in the west (Lisa Parks, Nicole Starolinski etc.) However, the invisibility of infrastructure is quickly refuted when one simply takes a stroll in neighborhoods of countries of the Global South. The story of my uncle's friend who climbed the electric tower to fetch his football highlighted how these objects are natural parts of Dahieh's neighborhoods and are interacted with by residents without much consideration. In this case, the electricity pole did not have to break down to make itself visible. In fact, its visibility had nothing to do with its functionality but with the fact that it was already exposed to residents.

It is the very fact that infrastructure is exposed in Dahieh that enables hard-piracy, it is then interesting to think about how people make use of the objects that work to inconvenience them and disrupt the flow of access. To understand Dahieh's position in Beirut, we would have to zoom out on the area. Beirut's urban planning is not only divided according to sect but to socioeconomic class as well. As discussed in the introduction, the history of how Dahieh and its residents came to be has a lot to do with the 15-year-long civil war, class, and conditions of access. The story of how Sahra, Chouifet came to be considered as a part of Dahieh is entangled with infrastructural shortcomings and locals and political parties patching up these gaps. Being infrastructurally alienated has its social impacts on the neglected groups. Many of the residents I spoke with brought up how the state neglects Dahieh and is more active in "Beirut." It was interesting how the residents referred to areas outside Dahieh as Beirut as if Dahieh is a remote part of the city. There surely are many reasons as to why those inside and outside Dahieh do not consider the area as part of the city, but the one I am interested in is the socioeconomic one in relation to conditions of access and the state of infrastructure. Deeb and Harb's *Leisurely Islam* (2013) clearly shows how youths of Dahieh felt uncomfortable spending time in the center of the city because they were discriminated against. The classism that Dahieh's residents face, even when they do not belong to lower class is telling of what Dahieh is associated with to those outside of it and reaffirms that political sects are not simply that, socioeconomic classes play a critical role in relating each party to class. This thesis attempted to answer where these associations come from and after research, we can confirm that being infrastructurally marginalized has much to do with how political/religious groups are perceived by others and themselves.

What comes as a result of exposed infrastructure, hard-piracy, and social stigmatization is a certain experience of space that takes into account the physical build-up of Dahieh and what the elements represent. The exposed wires and poor conditions of access are a reminder that residents on the periphery are actively neglected by the state and the biggest proof of this in the case of Dahieh is that before the crisis residents of Dahieh has to endure double the hours of electricity cuts in comparison to those living near the center. And when we look at how areas outside of Beirut are treated by the state, it becomes clear that the center enjoys services at the expense of those on the periphery.

The concepts of formal and informal access are not black and white in the case of Dahieh. Their definitions are distorted and they often blend into each other. Therefore, "official" and "alternative" in countries of the Global South mean different things than what is usually understood by these terms. To attain pirated access, residents would have to have the skills to conduct these activities or they would have to know someone who is willing to provide these services to them and as a result, this affects the social dynamics within neighborhoods. If one does not have the skills to attain pirated access, they would have to have the social mobility to request this from another local. Kinship is an important part of pirated access as we saw in chapter two. Pirating electricity is considered a favor that would have to be repaid by the consumer. Another thing about kinship that I noticed towards the end of my field research is that I wouldn't have been able to get answers from residents if I did not have an interlocutor. I was initially planning on interviewing people by introducing myself as a student. I discussed this with a friend who lives in Dahieh and he advised against it and later became my interlocutor. People were indeed more willing to talk to me when he introduced me to

them, some of them even answered my questions by addressing my interlocutor. This interested me because despite how normal pirated access is in Dahieh, talking about it freely only extends to those who belong to the community.

Furthermore, since Dahieh does not enjoy the state-provided services that central Beirut has, the residents try to fill the gaps by making use of the exposed wires by rigging. Most of the residents I spoke with use some kind of pirated access and whether its illegal WiFi, rigged access to electricity, or pirated access to TV channels, these methods of access undo our understanding of "alternative" because, for many, pirated access is the main and only way of access, and not the backup plan they resort to when their "official" access is disrupted.

Residents of Dahieh approach the idea of pirated access with a sense of normalcy, although the women showed concern about these activities being unethical and against religion since its stealing. This, also, can change the way the field looks at pirated access as it adds dimensions to it that have to do with the specific groups that use pirated access and what they define as moral or immoral.

Just as pirated access of basic services defines residents' understanding of these services and their position in society, pirated access to media consumption defines consumers' understanding of media. In this case, it is not limited to consuming movies, video games, or any other media production, but it has much to do with what consumers had to do in order to reach the consumption stage of media. Therefore, in the case of Dahieh we cannot jump to the discussion of media consumption without first analyzing what consumers have to do to be able to enjoy media productions. Examples of this would be the reassembled receivers and the fact that tenants have to resort to illegal WiFi providers because in most cases, landlords avoid giving them contracts to evade

taxes. With these two examples, consumption itself went through several stages of illegality in order to reach the consumers.

This thesis was able to uncover that taking into account the socioeconomic status of residents can offer a nuanced understanding of piracy, one that not only has to do with media access, but other factors such as urban history and planning, state attitudes, demographics, etc. This understanding highlights the multidisciplinary nature of the media studies field.

The classist state-attitude was highlighted in this thesis mainly by showing the hours of state electricity provided in Dahieh and central Beirut. Because Dahieh is not as nearly significant financially and touristically to the country like central Beirut, this division of electricity makes sense from a neoliberal point of view and this example can explain to us how larger economic and political structures affect our access to basic services and media. Additionally, what makes piracy in Dahieh a more contested topic is the fact that the state knows about these activities–as mentioned by Gebran Bassil and several residents that I spoke with–and have tried to put a stop to them to no avail. We can speculate that the pirated access of media and basic services keeps those on the margins satisfied enough not to cause inconvenience to the state.

Moreover, simply because piracy is approached with a sense of normalcy by all residents under the same socioeconomic conditions, that does not mean that residents' urban experiences are homogenous. Gender plays an important role in how experiences of urban spaces are gendered in relation to visible infrastructures, conditions of access, and socioeconomic status. The fact that piracy activities are carried out and managed by heteronormative men within neighborhoods most of the time adds yet another layer to media consumption and access to basic services. Despite the omnipresence of

infrastructure in Dahieh, the “bodily horizons” that they create are invisible. It is precisely because performing piracy activities holds meanings related to quotidian life, *not performing* them also uncovers and reiterates societal norms that we have inherited and accepted. In exploring what *not performing* entails, I was able to understand how truly complex the impact of visible infrastructure is and how access and distribution of basic services is itself a power that is enjoyed by its facilitators.

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